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Pirrie, Anne; Fang, Nini

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# Venturing From Home: Writing (and Teaching) as Creative-Relational Inquiry for Alternative Educational Futures

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Anne Pirrie<sup>1</sup>  and Nini Fang<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

This article explores the ecology of contemporary higher education by foregrounding the ethical relation between its authors. The article expresses their commitment to throwing off familiar academic conventions in order to promote human flourishing in a sector that has been colonized by new managerialism and the associated mechanisms of “performance management,” surveillance, and exclusion. The authors write into the emblems of the *naajavaarsuk* (the ivory gull) and *isumataq* (the Inuit storyteller). They explore collaborative writing as an ethical, relational practice whilst exposing the lived problematics that have become the “new normal” in the contemporary academy, for instance, the fetishization of “student satisfaction.” The latter has gained traction in the UK in recent years, and in extreme cases can call forth acts of ethical violence that induce deep and long-lasting effects. Their account is visceral rather than abstract, rooted in lived experience and in theory. The authors conclude that the precondition for human flourishing in conditions of constraint is neither all-out resistance nor quietist acceptance of the status quo. It is to open up a space for education that inheres in our relation to the other, and quietly to resist being defined and limited by practices of monitoring and surveillance.

<sup>1</sup>Division of Education, School of Education and Social Sciences, University of the West of Scotland, UK

<sup>2</sup>School of Health in Social Science, University of Edinburgh, UK

## Corresponding Author:

Anne Pirrie, Division of Education, School of Education and Social Sciences, University of the West of Scotland, Paisley PA1 2BE.

Email: Anne.Pirrie@uws.ac.uk

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## Taking Off: Something Might Happen

### *Venturing from home; relational ethics; hauntings; endurance*

Deleuze and Guattari (2004, p. 344) remind us that “one ventures from home on the thread of a tune.” The notion of “venturing out” captures the feeling of excitement and apprehensiveness that often marks the beginning of a new writing adventure. It also conveys that sense of “readiness to find what surrounds us strange and odd; a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought [and writing] and to look at the same things in a different way” (Foucault, 1980, p. 328). The affective jangling involved in weaving this narrative is implicated in the subversive idea of “hitting home.” In our case, this was premised initially upon the examination of a lived experience that was *too close to home*, one that cast a long shadow of nameless dread over one of the authors. Bearing in mind the theme of this special issue of *International Review of Qualitative Research*, we suggest that *qualitative inquiry as activism* can begin as creative-relational inquiry as exorcism. We hope to demonstrate that both are necessary if we are to cultivate the art of living well in the oppressive climate of contemporary higher education.

The notion of venturing out also disrupts the dichotomy between distance and proximity, so that what once appeared irrelevant and remote now feels strikingly familiar. We shall see below how long repressed tales of historical oppression and violence associated with the legacy of colonialism reverberate into the present. In recent years, the university sector has been colonized by new managerialism and the associated mechanisms of “performance management,” surveillance, and exclusion (Ball, 2015, 2019; Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Benjamin, 2018). The experiences described below hit home at the level of the person and were met with forms of institutional violence that added present-day insult to historical injury. We hope to demonstrate that the institutionalized practices that have become the “new normal” in the academy, for instance, the fetishization of “student satisfaction” (Pirrie, 2018; Pirrie & Day, 2019; Skea, 2017) and the pervasiveness of systems of monitoring and control, are at best remote and irrelevant and at worst damaging and destructive.

Given our initial emphasis on “venturing from home,” it is no coincidence that we take two Inuit words as the starting point for the particular “line of drift” explored in our joint “writing as inquiry” (Wyatt, 2109). The *naajavaarsuk*, or ivory gull, is distinguished by its habit of “standing on the perimeter of the action, darting in to snatch something when there is an opening” (Lopez, 2019, p. 69). As coauthors we are certainly not birds of a feather: for a start, one of us is mottled white, the other pale beige. Nini has a background in counseling and psychotherapy; Annie has a background in the humanities and has since migrated into the field of education. Yet together, we evolved a *modus vivendi* that involved darting in and out of the same space, tearing

away at something with precision and determination. (Is it alive or dead? Will it fly off? Does it taste good?) Ours was a curious “marriage of print – of white and black – ... a coupling of two subversions fighting each other at the very heart of their union” (Jabès, 1996, p. 24). As we have no shared disciplinary or cultural heritage, marshaling ourselves under the banner of an ivory gull was an ironic gesture. We came to regard the *naajavaarsuk* as emblematic of our practice as coauthors. The Inuit name for the ivory gull also became our personal battle cry: *naajavaarsuk!* As we came to know each other better, it emerged that we were confronting the hauntings of various forms of violence: historical, interpersonal, and institutional. All three are intertwined in the story told by Nini below. Creating openings into those moments enables us to show how “relational ethics” (Frosh, 2011) may be embodied. We have espoused a form of ethics as social praxis by exploring the kind of ethical relation we would *like* to have with each other rather than complying with institutional directives to relate to each other “as neo-liberal subjects, individual, striving, responsible, competitive, enterprising” (Ball, 2015, p. 258). The ethical concerns explored below “spread from the interpersonal and ‘intersubjective’ through to the interethnic and international, [harnessing] themselves to situations in which a group feels itself to have been wronged by another group” (Frosh, 2015, p. 158). This relational-ethical approach provided the means to recast creative-relational inquiry as activism as well as to exercise a form of gleeful and intractable resistance, to destabilize the status quo, to make things “not as necessary as all that” (Foucault, 1971, p. 8). Experimentation with form is part of this undertaking, and we make no attempt to disguise the *writerliness* of this text. In sum, the kind of ethico-politics that we espouse

is visceral rather than abstract, rooted as much in the physical and emotional as it is in logic. It rests on a refusal to accept the grounds on which subjectivity is proposed within dominant discourses and a willingness to subvert them – a subversion that is transformative rather than just disruptive. (Ball, 2019, p. 4)

The *isumataq* is a storyteller who “creates the atmosphere in which wisdom reveals itself” (Lopez, 2019, p. 92). As the attentive reader may already have guessed, the telling of stories (and stories within stories) plays a key role in the form of creative-relational inquiry as activism that characterizes our way of working, and of working together.

We have begun with an account of process in order to draw a distinction between activity, particularly in the sense of the various forms of busyness (and business) that are prized in the contemporary academy—and activism. The latter is generally defined as a means of bringing about political or social change. Paradoxically, we suggest that this might involve being *less* busy. Writing about the virtues of endurance, Frosh (2015, p. 157) poses the following question: “How do we stay still for long enough to allow something to happen?” His answer is that we remain in a situation “until it organizes itself under the pressure of its own desire.” We interpret this as an act of resistance to the cultural and institutional pressures just to get on with things. Rather than

rush past these obstacles and enslave ourselves to endless to-do lists, perhaps what we really need to do is to wait, and to ask ourselves (and each other) what these obstacles “know.” Only in this way can we open the gates to the ethical imagination. As Frosh (2015, p. 169) explains, “endurance [is not] quietist acceptance, but ... the sense of waiting, of opening out oneself to the possibility that really looking into the gaze of the other might alert one to something that one did not already know, something radically new.” Pirrie (2018) has explored this in relation to pedagogy, suggesting that the mission of the reflexive teacher is not (merely) to keep the student “satisfied,” but rather to encourage her to accept that “every thought has its joys and its bruises” (Jabès, 1996, p. 16), and that teaching, learning, and studying are honestly difficult. Smith (2016) has explored the “virtues of unknowing,” which echo the relational ethics proposed by Frosh (2015). Smith (2016) distinguishes “unknowingness” from ignorance, and regards the former as a gentle framing of the attention toward the unknown. This brings with it a disposition toward patience and humility. The view of endurance advanced by Frosh (2015) also reinstates *desire* as an important driver of intellectual work, albeit one that is unlikely to feature in processes of “activity planning” or “performance development” in the contemporary academy.

We took our time. We found an opening for creative-relational inquiry, a space through which to dart in and out. More importantly, we found in each other a coauthor, listener, and respondent. We stumbled across a way of working that embodies the virtues of endurance. During our first encounter, we told each other our stories, as we endured the discomfort caused by perching uneasily on high stools for two and a half hours in a “social area” in the university where one of us works.

Prioritizing the ontological significance of stories over exchanges relating to theory was both a spontaneous response to working across disciplinary boundaries *and* a deliberate choice in the face of the obdurate professional difficulties. As Madison (1999, p. 109) has observed: “performance thrills me, theory does not. I would surely lose myself without performance, but I cannot live well without theory.” At that first meeting, we engaged in a mutual form of calling, anticipating, and receiving. This set the pattern for working in call and response mode, exchanging emails, text messages, and fragments of writing, fluttering back and forth, winging it like the *naajavaarsuk* that had become our emblem. We found ourselves in each other: we also found in each other the academic life that we thought we had lost. In retrospect, it emerged that our particular *modus operandi* was our way of responding as embodied subjects to an environment that seemed more hostile than an arctic wasteland. We are of course referring to the “anxiety machine” of contemporary higher education (Hall & Bowles, 2016; see also Morrish, 2019).

The image of the bird that we are calling *naajavaarsuk* brings to mind a drifting line of flight. Birds have a defiant relationship with gravity. They encapsulate an embodied quality of lightness that is distinctly warm-blooded rather than ethereal. Calling (out) to each other kept us hovering in the air and prevented us from going to ground, or getting lost in the dark. *Naajavaarsuk* and *isumataq*: these words serve a dual function. First, they provide an overture to an exploration of the process of writing as a

performative activity, a place for experimentation and care of the self within a higher education context that is increasingly inimical to both. This involves navigating with an ethical compass across cold and hostile territory; embracing relational ethics as a necessary precondition for activism; and engaging in dialogic conversation rather than in the kind of verbal jousting that characterizes conventional academic exchanges. Sennett (2012, p. 18) explains how “in verbal conversation, as in musical rehearsal, exchanging is built from the ground up.” In musical terms, the ability to go on playing together “comes from paying attention to what another person implies but does not say ... in picking up on concrete details, on specifics ... those small phrases, facial gestures or silences which open up a discussion.” Second, the vision of the *naajavaarsuk* reminds us that the point of departure often involves a readiness to stand at the perimeter of the action rather than to strive to be the center of attention. As academics, we have a tendency to locate ourselves within a particular scholarly tradition or “field.” We like to be “in the thick of it,” and yet we also like to maintain our distance from others, particularly those whom we consider to belong to a different academic “tribe.” Annie and Nini may belong to different “tribes”; yet their names encapsulate a deep resonance that transcends disciplinary and cultural differences.

The *isumataq*, the Inuit storyteller betokens a different relationship with agency, fading into the background in order that wisdom can reveal itself through the performance of stories. The fascination for indigenous communities that is evident in these Inuit incantations is not incidental either. They invoke a quality of endurance that is rooted in a particular place. They give us the courage to dwell in a hostile climate. They speak of skillful adaptation, of darting in to snatch something when there is an opening. They too are rooted in community, and often in communities under pressure.

The *naajavaarsuk* and the *isumataq* see the world without *Deleuzions*, as it were (i.e., standing still, darting in; stories first, theory later). The *naajavaarsuk* and the *isumataq* engage with the world in a *topian* manner: that is to say, they are rooted in the rough and the smooth of a particular landscape. In contrast, for the conventional researcher-writer-scholar-teacher, embodied, performative engagement with a particular terrain is often subordinated to a utopian account of the external features of a disciplinary “landscape” within a particular educational climate. As Pirrie (2019, p. 28) points out, “discourse of this type is replete with cartographic metaphors ... for example, the way in which we refer to an area of inquiry, a field of knowledge, to the boundaries between disciplines, or indeed even to the limits of our knowledge.” These large generic units form a kind of epistemological and depopulated “blandscape” (Macfarlane, 2015, p. 5). They tell us little about how we *live* with what we *know*, and nothing at all about the endlessly relational nature of the material world.

In this article, we explore in and through our writing what qualitative inquiry as activism might mean, what it looks like, and what it might *do*, in the context of contemporary higher education. We have gestured at theory (relational ethics and the virtues of endurance, for instance, Frosh, 2011, 2015). But first we needed to sit opposite each other, with our four arms and our four legs and to be fully present in each other’s

company for long enough for something to happen. This relational embodiment, this movement beyond the self, was the precursor to performing our stories and being transported to other times, other places. It was only then that we could bear the arms of theory.

Nini's story begins with another story, as told by Eddo-Lodge (2017), who describes her close encounters with the legacy of colonialism as a university student. This sets the scene for Nini's account of the turn of events that occurred when she was addressing the theme of race relations for a third-year undergraduate course on difference and diversity in counseling and psychotherapy at an English university. In the midst of organizing the curriculum for her new course, Nini heard Eddo-Lodge's calling and descended toward it:

It wasn't until my second year of university that I started to think about black British history [...] I'd only ever encountered black history through America-centric educational displays [...] the household names of America's civil rights movement felt important to me, but also a million miles away from my life as a young black girl growing up in north London. But this short university module changed my perspective completely. It dragged Britain's colonial history and slave trading past incredibly *close to home*.

[...] My friend, on the other hand, stuck around for a couple of tutorials before dropping out of the class altogether. 'It's just not for me', she said. [...] I didn't have the vocabulary to raise it with her at the time. But I know now that I was resentful of her because I felt that her whiteness allowed her to be disinterested in Britain's violent history, to close her eyes and walk away. To me, this didn't seem like the information you could opt out from learning (Eddo-Lodge, 2017, p. 1–3; italics added)

These words called out to Nini to act, to make her course an invitation to students to come close to these historically and culturally related "homes" as places of unsettlement rather than complacent occupation. The fact that this was a mandatory course with no possibility of "opting out" felt precious to Nini in the light of Eddo-Lodge's account. The indifference of the white classmate made Annie feel uneasy, although it was in marked contrast to the relational ethics that formed the basis of her co-inquiry with Nini. As Nini pointed out, such indifference disenfranchises the demand of the other for justice, so that what is done *is* done.

"I don't know what it was about that story that got under my skin. It was just *too close to home*, in the sense that it reminded me of that feeling of being 'othered'. The faces of some my students, particularly those of Afro-Caribbean origin came very close to me," said Nini of the account presented by Eddo-Lodge (2017). "But the story hadn't really *hit home* yet, and I certainly wasn't going to let it make itself *at home*." So together we embraced the black-and-white of text and, in a penumbra of doubt that was neither light nor dark, we attempted to explore what had happened. Nini recounted how she had set out to explore with her students what had happened to Reni, and why she was no longer talking to white people about race.

It's 10 a.m. on a late autumn day. Nini turns on the light in a gloomy classroom in a university somewhere in the middle of England. Students from ethnic minorities are sitting on one side of the room, and the white students are sitting on the other.

## **Nini's Story: Something Happened**

### *Hitting home; talking to white people about race*

I want to turn away. To edge toward the door of that room and exit. I can say that I am having a tummy ache and cannot continue with the class and I am sorry about this. That would not be a lie.

The light is still off. English mornings in mid-October are becoming less forgiving when the artificial light has not been turned on to mask the dying summer light flickering from the cloud-patched sky. I cannot see the faces of my students. Parts of their faces are cast in some irregular shadows as if they are wearing a mourning veil. I cannot see them although they are facing me, their eyes peering through the veils at me. My 10 a.m. class is about to start. I hesitate but bumble toward the light switch and turn it on.

The light forces me to see that the classroom is colour-coded into the division of light and shadow. The assortment of paler bodies on one side of the classroom contrasts starkly against the black and a mixture of light to dark brown bodies on the other side of the room. All eyes are staring at me as if demanding that I decide to which side I belong, with my tofu-toned skin.

"Are you all comfortable with where you are?" is my best attempt at breaking this painful, paralyzing silence.

More silence.

I look around and notice that the two students who had written to me individually to tell me that they would not attend the class today are here—arms crossed, single brow-raised, slumped in their thrones, apparently pleased with the block of white army they have managed to raise before me. "You'd better be careful today," they seem to say. We have been here before, you see. Their letters to me have made the point certain and clear—it was I who started this unwanted war against them. As organizer and teacher on this course on diversity and core issues in counseling and psychotherapy, I was the one who had chosen to have on the curriculum *two* sessions on the genesis of racism and on psychotherapy as reparative work. In the previous week, I had had the audacity to tell the class the stories of slavery, in an attempt to open their eyes to the atrocious legacy of colonialism. That's when all this started.

During the first session the previous week, a few students had expressed the view that their history lessons in school had taught them that the overall legacy of the British Empire was positive, despite some "unfortunate" consequences. One of them went on to say that they had believed that the British anthem must be sung with nationalist pride. However, the session I had led had made this difficult for them. I had nodded in apparent agreement, as I had taken this as the beginning of a reflective process.



However, the letter that had arrived the next day made me see that it was meant as warning.<sup>1</sup>

Dear Nini,

My point was that you succeeded in raising awareness of ‘othering’ but only from the point that it’s white people doing it to other races and your material and leading questions were suggestive. The point of the lecture was to realize there ‘is no race’ and ‘skin color doesn’t make us different’ but I was made to feel ashamed because of mine.

The Britishness I refer to is my ethnicity, and yesterday I felt as though I couldn’t be proud of that in the same way others in the room could be proud of theirs. My example of singing the national anthem was merely an example to aid you in understanding my points.

I won’t be there next week.

Thanks.

Here I am, caught in a tofu-toned middle ground, neither white nor black, neither the “doer” nor the “done to” (Benjamin, 2004, 2018). “Where do you stand?” “Whose side are you on?”—the students’ gaze seems to demand me to pick a side. I feel my voice wavering as I attempt to ground myself by drawing their attention to the slide that gives an overview of today’s session. “We shall explore how the external, the social, interacts with the internal, the psyche. We shall also explore how racism can become internalized, and the implications of this for therapy.” I can hardly bear to look at them. I avert my gaze. I feel afraid, for reasons I can’t explain. I press on to the next slide. Akala, a British hip-hop artist and political activist for black and minority ethnic communities, takes the screen. It is a comfort to have him behind me, as the students now stare at him rather than me. I ask the students if they recognize him. To my surprise, the writer of the letter immediately identifies him. Encouraged, I take a few steps forward and ask if they know Akala from his music. The writer of the letter replies that they know him from the slides that I had dutifully uploaded on the virtual learning environment (VLE) before the session, in accordance with university policy. I laugh nervously. That wasn’t quite what I had in mind.

I carry on, as if they were laughing with me rather than at me. “Pay attention to the message of the song and how it makes you feel as you listen,” I say as I retreat toward the console and release the melodic first riffs of *Find No Enemy*.<sup>2</sup> I wonder what the students are thinking as Akala fills the room. We might just have to stay still for long enough to allow something to happen. We might just have to wait.

During the discussion, the mood in the room softens as people on different sides of the room enter into exchanges with one another. A student from the “dark” side of the class observes that she had not realized Akala was mixed-race. She had assumed his blackness from the picture presented to them: “he is gorgeous though,” she said, provoking soft laughter from the class. A student from the “white” side of the class shares

concerns about the identity confusion Akala must have experienced, given that he does not fit in either box of black and white, and goes on to talk about the importance of cultural awareness. I let the discussion happen without intervening. I read the fact that they are talking to each other across the room as a promising sign. I feel hopeful that “we” are better prepared to enter into Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008) [1952] after the break.

## **Annie and Nini: Something is Happening**

### *Dialogue; and the tyranny of student satisfaction*

“So that wasn’t the end of it?” asked Annie.

“No, it wasn’t,” replied Nini. “I was trying to get the students to engage with the idea of the Other and all the time I was subjecting myself to my own gaze as an institutionalized object to be scrutinized. And that extended beyond the classroom. What happened next was not something I had expected.”

“Even worse than the fact that half the class deserted you after the break?” asked Annie.

“Yes, even worse than that,” said Nini. “But first let me finish telling you about what happened next in the class. I had asked the students to prepare personal responses to extracts from *Black Skin, White Masks* [1952], a riveting investigation of colonialism (Fanon, 2008 [1952]). Fanon had drawn upon psychoanalysis to study the effects of racism on individuals, particularly those from minority ethnic backgrounds. I was using his text as he had originally intended, that is, as an invitation to understand the black-white relation’ (Fanon, 2008 [1952], p. 3). We were due to reconvene for the third hour of teaching that day (the gods of timetabling are implacable) in order to share our responses to the readings from Fanon. I had asked the students to prepare their responses as if they were addressing him personally, so to write along the lines of ‘I think what you are trying to say is that...’ rather than ‘he says.’ I did that in order to keep relational ethics at the forefront of our attention.”

“That sounds really good,” said Annie.

“Thanks. I thought I might get them to relate to him (and to each other) in different ways. But during the break I noticed that there were only a few students left in the room, mostly from minority ethnic backgrounds. They were sitting around chatting in subdued tones. I approached them, hoping to find out what they had thought of the session so far. They told me, wearily, that rather than heading to the university coffee shop as usual, some of the students had gone straight to the office of the program director. They also said they felt sorry that matters had got so “out of hand.” A few of the students who had left the room trickled back after the break, coffee in hand. Most did not. The white troop had gone in search of allies—sealed in their whiteness—leaving the black students sealed in theirs, to paraphrase Fanon.”

“Did you ever find out what they were accusing you of? What were they complaining about?” asked Annie.

“That the sessions were *too* unsettling. I then received a gentle reminder from the management that I needed to tailor my teaching more toward the National Student Survey (NSS) [a mechanism in the UK through which students can ‘validate’ the efforts of their teachers by delivering high scores in respect of proxy indicators of ‘student satisfaction’]. How could I know how to unsettle them to just the right degree when inviting them to consider the contingency of power, truth, and subjectivity, to think differently about their relation to themselves and to others?”

“That, surely, is what going to university is all about, replied Annie.

## What Happened? What Can We Do About It?

### *Toward a horizon of freedom; experimentation; situated understanding; critique*

Staying still is a challenging task when one is confronted by the emotional waves of shame, anger, insecurity and feeling wronged. These arouse an almost irresistible temptation to react and to force everything to an end, as opposed to staying still, “not ‘acting in’ or ‘acting out’, learning to be full of reverie oneself” (Frosh, 2015, p. 168). It is also a matter of being full of reverie *for oneself*, for the value of one’s teaching, pedagogical commitments and visions, so that we can afford to hope and stay right where we are and remain still. To stay still long enough to allow conditions to mature through the course of waiting for the change to occur—whilst simultaneously bearing with the possibility that no dream could ever be grander, no hope more utopian. The events detailed above had a profound impact upon Nini, and continued to cause her disquiet long after they had passed. They had been the catalyst for the fledgling collaboration with Annie. This was a *Wahlverwandschaft* (elective affinity) that opened up a space for thinking differently and for frank speaking: “a space of education that is not defined and limited by an institutional rationale, but is part of and related to forms of self-fashioning carried out elsewhere” (Ball, 2019, p. 10). “Things don’t have to be this way,” said Nini to Annie. “We are freer than we think we are”, said Annie to Nini. *Naajavaarsuk!*

Nini’s attempts to cultivate relational ethics with the students in her class by encouraging them to rethink the legacy of colonialism had been received with hostility at a personal level. This was then compounded by “ethical violence” at an institutional level, in the form of a veiled injunction to comply with institutional directives to make “student satisfaction” the core educational value. These developments were at the expense of thinking things through together; encouraging students to see the taken-for-granted in a different light; cultivating an orientation toward curiosity; and bringing about a tacit acceptance that profound educational processes are inevitably discomfiting. Nini had attempted to “identify and refuse and transgress the horizon of silent objectification” (Ball, 2015, p. 2) within which the students were located, only to discover that she had fallen victim to the same forces, at an institutional level. She experienced a double sense of impotence, with long-lasting and debilitating effects that

could only be alleviated by entering into an ethical relation with another, by venturing out on the thread of a tune and engaging in “critically informed, oppositional micro-politics” (Leask, 2012, p. 57). As Leask (2012, p. 57) explains, “the power-relations that (quite literally) constitute education can now be regarded, on Foucault’s own terms, as being creative, ‘enabling’ and ‘positive’”

Butler (2005) used the term “ethical violence” to describe attempts to call forth a version of the other that makes the other something it should not be. In his highly personal account of “living in the neo-liberal university,” Ball (2015) describes the practices and technologies (e.g., annual reviews, league tables and rankings, “impact” narratives, and performance-related pay) that serve to “discipline” academics and construe them as “docile bodies” who are disinclined to engage in critique and reluctant to think differently. Ball (2015, p. 258) describes how the net effect of the “performative individualism” that pervades contemporary education is that as academics “our worth, our humanity and complexity are abridged.” The conventional response to these pressures is to indulge in what Aristotle described as *alazony*: the hyperbole or boastfulness that captured by the modern term “to big up.” However, this only serves further to entrench performative individualism. As Ball (2019, p. 33) explains:

We are bound by epistemic rules and closures that enable and constrain us to think within certain versions of what is and might be true – the conditions of possibility of modern thought, established practices of remembering and forgetting, and an exteriority that is prior to any conscious activity of a meaningful subjectivity.

Conroy and Smith (2017, p. 12) point out that the “prioritizing of impact casts as marginal the researcher who is modest or diffident.” The conventional response to relentless institutional pressures is to create and curate personal websites, to blog, tweet, issue press releases, and anxiously look out for the number of retweets, followers, downloads, and “likes” in a dizzying matrix of metrics. There is a tendency to respond to mechanisms of surveillance by marshaling them to our own advantage. Nini’s first reaction upon hearing that some students were making a complaint against her was momentary relief that she had recorded the session. She could demonstrate that she had not been fomenting racial tensions in class. This is further evidence of the damaging effects of regimes of surveillance and control.

We have attempted to demonstrate that the ethical response to current malaise in higher education is to open up to vulnerability and unruly curiosity rather than to submit to domestication. We set out together under the banner of the *naajjavaarsuk*. We conclude with the observation that it is only by venturing out on the thread of a tune and embracing risk and uncertainty that one can fully apprehend the other. It is only thus that one can know something of gentleness. It is only thus that we can cultivate care of the self and care of others; maintain mobility of mind and spirit in a professional environment that seeks to limit and constrain. It is only thus that we can prepare the ground for positive educational futures.

Several days later, Nini received a collective email from several minority ethnic students in her class informing her of their initiative to create a new society as a response to the sessions. Their society would take promoting multiculturalism in higher education as its key mission. They told Nini that it would be about cultures, not colors.

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### ORCID iD

Anne Pirrie  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3141-3786>

### Notes

1. Whilst these are the student's original words, the name and all identifiable information have been carefully removed.
2. [https://lyrics.fandom.com/wiki/Akala:Find\\_No\\_Enemy](https://lyrics.fandom.com/wiki/Akala:Find_No_Enemy)

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## Author Biographies

**Anne Pirrie** is a reader in education at the University of the West of Scotland.

**Nini Fang** is a lecturer in counselling, psychotherapy, and applied social sciences (CPASS) at the University of Edinburgh.